

The Resurrection

DAVE BAST

The famous 18th Century skeptic, Voltaire, is reported to have said: It would be easy to start a new religion to compete with Christianity; all the founder would have to do is to die and then be raised from the dead. Well, Voltaire was no friend to the Christian faith, and I am sure he meant his comment to be ironic, but it is also very perceptive. Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of our faith. Christianity stands or falls on the factualness of this event. Christian faith is really Easter faith because it is all based on what happened that first Easter day; and on this Easter Sunday, we look once more at the story and ask if it is really true. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, happy Easter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Happy Easter.

DAVE BAST

Christ is risen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is risen indeed.

DAVE BAST

Yes. That is why we are here, frankly. If he is not risen, if he is still dead, if the resurrection is just a myth or a story, then I am out of here; and I suspect maybe you are, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. We will reflect on this in different ways in this particular program, where we are going to be going through Luke's resurrection account; Luke 24; but is it something the Apostle Paul talks about, too, in that famous chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul basically says to the Corinthians – who were doubting the physical resurrection – Paul basically says: Folks, if that did not happen, we are idiots. We are, of all people, the most to be pitied and there is nothing for it. The whole movement is a sham.

Luke 24:1: One the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³But when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee? ⁷‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again.’” ⁸Then they remembered his words. ⁹And when they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the

eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them, and they told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb; bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

DAVE BAST

What a story! Really, what we want to do in this program is fairly simple. We just want to look at that story, point out some of the details – some of the interesting elements – ask the question: Is it credible? Can we actually believe it? Is there reason for accepting this testimony? Finally, what difference does it make? If we did believe it, what would that mean for us, for our world, for the human race? So, let's start by just looking at the story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What stands out to me about Luke – and we will certainly see this if we were to look at the end of Luke, you will see more of that – but, all four of the Gospels are somewhat understated in how they present this great triumph, and they are also extremely honest. Nobody believes this easily or right off the bat. So, the women get to the tomb and they see the stone rolled away; and for them, that was the equivalent of if we went to a cemetery today, went near the grave of a loved one and we saw a bunch of dirt dug up; we would think: Oh, oh. Somebody has been messing with this grave. And that is what they thought: Somebody has been messing with it, and about the only reason anybody messed with an ordinary grave in that day, or any day, was grave robbery for some ghastly purpose. So, they probably assumed that Jesus' body had been stolen. I mean, dead people do not move; and so, they made the logical conclusion: Somebody moved him for him; he did not move, but somebody took him.

DAVE BAST

Right. The people who are going there are all women. It is this bunch of women, and Luke names several of them, and then he says there were others, too. Again, if you look at the other Gospel accounts, there are different names given; but, real people, not imaginary people, with real names; people who could be talked to, whose story could be ascertained, and they are going there, not in any expectation of seeing Jesus at all other than...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A dead Jesus...

DAVE BAST

His dead body, because the funeral preparations had been interrupted. Imagine a funeral director who is preparing a body for burial and suddenly the power goes out or something. Well, in their case, it was the Sabbath day coming. Jesus died late on a Friday afternoon; the Sabbath began at sunset; there was no time properly to prepare, so they simply wrapped his body and put it in this nearby tomb, and then these women are coming to finish to job on Sunday morning. So, the first witnesses are all women, which is itself a significant point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If Luke or Matthew, Mark, or John for that matter – if any of the writers of the Gospels had wanted to embroider this tale – if they wanted to embellish it to make it more dramatic – if they wanted to write it in such a way to make it more believable – there are a whole lot of things they would have done differently than what they actually did; and one of them – and I know this sounds very sexist, and it is – but, in the First Century, the testimony of women was not esteemed; it was not admissible in court; and so, if you were going to make up a story you really wanted people to believe, you would not have women reporting it first, because that would be a death knell. It would undercut the credibility of your story; but, Luke is just telling us what happened; and as it happened, it was the women who went to finish the embalming process. They were the first ones to see it and the first ones to witness to it.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is just how it happened.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are not going to change it just to embellish it.

DAVE BAST

So, we start with these basic elements of the story: The women are going to the tomb expecting simply to finish the burial of their friend, Jesus. When they come, they find the grave is empty. If there is one thing that is certain, it is that this is not some sort of spiritual experience or event that is being described here. Jesus' body was not there. Peter even comes and sees the grave clothes, the cloth that they wrapped him in. So, when they say, "He is not here," which they hear the angels say – it is not like we sometimes say in a funeral home: "Well, you know, Jimmy, Grandpa is not really here. He is with Jesus." They did not mean that in some vague, spiritual sense. They meant the body was missing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There was no there, there. He was not there.

DAVE BAST

Right, right. And the third thing I think is important to point out is that all of the disciples had trouble believing this. Just as you or I would if we went to the hypothetical cemetery and saw the dirt turned over and an empty grave.

There is this wonderful line that Luke has that when the women came back and said: Hey, Jesus is gone. His body is missing, but the angels said to us, 'He is risen from the dead,' and Luke says it seemed to them like nonsense. It seemed to the other disciples like an idle tale.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which it was. It is nonsense to say that, all things being equal. We would say the same thing to somebody today. That is ridiculous. That is nonsense. What are you talking about? Grandpa is not alive again. He died; we buried him. Sometimes more contemporary skeptics and critics of the Gospels have said: Well, of course those First Century people believed this story. They did not know science. They were so naïve. They did not know what we know. Well, they knew enough to know dead people stay dead; and so, even though the angels told the women: This is what he told you this was going to happen; he is alive. The women still have not run into him personally; nobody has; and when they tell the disciples, they do not believe a word of it. Again, this is a story that bears all the marks of an authentic telling. This is just how it went. We are not embroidering it or embellishing it. We will want to think a little bit more about that and some of what these other details mean in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, as today we are celebrating Easter on this program, and celebrating it through the witness of Luke, in Luke Chapter 24.

DAVE BAST

Right, and the witness to the resurrection as the story unfolds, really quite naturally told, quite straightforward, is that Jesus' grave was empty on Sunday morning. It had been occupied on Friday afternoon. When the women came, they found that it was gone. They heard this incredible announcement from angels that he had risen from the dead; he was not there, not because someone had taken the body, but because he had been raised by the power of God, and they went and told the disciples, who did not believe it. So, that is the story as we have it so far.

Let's talk about the alternatives – and really, there is only one realistic alternative today to the truthfulness of the resurrection story, and that is the modern – we might call it the liberal approach – that this is a mythical account; an attempt to put in story form something that the disciples experienced.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When it comes to this particular story, Dave, there are not too many alternatives. It is either completely true or it is completely false. It was either reported exactly the way it happened or it was completely made up. The only middle position that some people have tried – and I have always found it to be a very squishy, unconvincing middle position – is that there can be meaning found in the idea of Jesus, even if his body stayed dead as a doornail in a tomb somewhere and he was not really raised. I do not find that to be real credible, but that is a mediating position to say that there is something worthwhile to Christianity, even if he is dead. But really, even that says he is still dead. So really, there are only two alternatives – this happened or it didn't.

DAVE BAST

It is very difficult to believe that the whole thing is a cynical plot that they knowingly wrote what they believed was false in an effort to fool people. I do not think very many people actually do believe that, or ever have, really. That takes a greater leap of faith than believing in a God who raises the dead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The other thing is that that would have meant that the disciples, about whom the Gospels – all four of the Gospels are very, very honest – they were clueless most of the time they followed Jesus. They did not understand half of what Jesus said. They were still hoping for a political Messiah. They were still hoping for an earthly kingdom. They were hoping for earthly rewards. They were not quite tracking most of the time. Misunderstanding is their default setting. So, it would really hard to believe that those guys would have then, on the fly, made up an entire story to keep the thing going.

DAVE BAST

Or that they had it all figured out. Where is the Machiavelli who – the mastermind. I can see Judas maybe playing that role, but he is gone by this point, so the others are, as you say, they are just sort of stumble bums. They did not have the wherewithal to pull it off.

Getting back to this mediating position that you talk about, it is very common, and I think it is common among academics in particular, who have an interest in Christianity, but just do not go with the full, supernatural route that Jesus actually rose...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is enough that he was alive in their memory...

DAVE BAST

They will talk about Jesus being raised in the disciples' minds and hearts. Somehow, they are sitting around and they are sharing stories – you know how it is, a friend has been lost and you come together in your grief and somebody tells a story and somebody else reminisces and pretty soon it is as though he is alive, and out of that somehow evolves this whole fantastic Easter story. I do not buy that either. Like you, I just do not find that at all convincing because it is not just that they wrote the story down, the first followers of Jesus were proclaiming this in the streets of Jerusalem just weeks after it happened.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And ultimately, most of them died on account of not being willing to recant it. You know, when I graduated from seminary, now almost a quarter-century ago, my commencement speaker was Charles Colson, the man who had worked for Richard Nixon, and then went on to found Prison Fellowship; and Colson wrote years ago that while he was in prison and he found Jesus and was converted while he was in prison for his crimes in the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon presidency in the early 1970s, Colson said that the one thing that convinced him more than anything that the Gospels were true was that the disciples died rather than recant...

DAVE BAST

Deny the truthfulness...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Colson said, "Nobody dies for a lie." He said, "All of us in the Watergate conspiracy had all vowed that we would not tell the truth;" and then as soon as a little pressure got put on them, everybody cracked.

DAVE BAST

Everybody is trying to... yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Everybody said, "Never mind; never mind," and they were not being threatened with their lives; they were just being threatened with six months at Danbury Minimum Security Prison.

DAVE BAST

They are all trying to cop a plea all of a sudden.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Colson's point was nobody dies for a lie. Nobody even suffers very much for something you know is a lie. The disciples went – almost every last one of them – the disciples turned apostles were martyred. They were killed, and lots of Christians in the early centuries would rather die than say: Okay, it is not true. They knew it was true. That is why they proclaimed it.

DAVE BAST

The disciples' faith in Jesus did not create the story of the resurrection. The story of the resurrection – the testimony to the resurrection – is what created the disciples' faith. It is what rescued them from hopeless despair, from sorrow, and you see that. They are all at sea after Jesus' death, and then something transforms them, and it does it instantly, into joyful, victorious, fearless preachers of the Good News that Jesus is God's Messiah and he has been vindicated – although he was crucified – he is vindicated through his resurrection from the dead. And that makes a difference, not only for them; that makes a difference for you and me; and we want to look at just what that difference is in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork* on this Easter program, where we are looking at the account of the resurrection of Jesus in Luke Chapter 24, and we have been talking a lot, Dave, on this program about the authenticity, I think we can call it, of the Gospel accounts, including Luke's. These are not embellished stories; these are not embroidered stories; all of the Gospels are honest about the fact that no human being witnessed the resurrection. Nobody witnessed the moment Jesus emerged alive from the tomb. So, they did not make it up, either. It would really help the story if you could say: Oh, yeah. Peter saw it.

DAVE BAST

This is what happened, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, historical honesty and the historical fact is that no one did see it at the moment it happened, so they do not say anyone did. They do not make it up.

DAVE BAST

My old New Testament professor, George Eldon Ladd, used to say in New Testament Theology class, “If you could have witnessed the resurrection, what would you have seen?” He would add, “You would not have seen a corpse suddenly twitch and sit up as if it were a resuscitation; simply a returning to life of a dead body.” He said, “You probably would have seen something like a nuclear explosion – just a blinding light and then nothing – because what the resurrection means is that Jesus’ body physically was transformed into the life of the world to come.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

It was the future breaking into the past.

DAVE BAST

Exactly. Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is our future. When we say Jesus is the firstfruits, what we mean is when we gather in our churches to celebrate Easter Sunday, we are recalling a past event, which is actually our future. It was sort of like time travel, right? The resurrected body of Jesus is the future of the kingdom occurring at a specific moment in history and it is our future even now. Right; I think there had to be a blinding light. No wonder there was an earthquake. It was the in-breaking of our collective future into a distinct moment in history, and indeed, what a cosmos-shattering event that was. But what is interesting, too, Dave, and we have been noticing this is that despite that amazing fact, the Gospels, and Luke in particular here, are in no hurry to say the disciples figured it all out in a snap. In fact, it will be Pentecost – 50 days later – before they really get it. And what will they get at the time? They will see all of the dots connected. They will see the Old Testament – the Hebrew scriptures – they will see the whole story from the moment God created the cosmos – they will finally figure out the full scope of all of the prophets and the suffering Messiah; some of the stuff they ignored before; and it will all coalesce in Jesus.

By the time you get to just a very few short years after the resurrection, you get someone like Paul writing to the Colossians, in Colossians 1 and Paul saying: You know what? The entire universe comes together in Jesus. It was created by him, for him, and now it finds its purpose and hangs together in Jesus. That is a remarkable testimony about a Jewish carpenter who had been crossed out by the Romans. Now he is the cosmic key.

DAVE BAST

It started with the resurrection. That opened their eyes. Before that, they had believed Jesus was the Messiah. They believed he was the king of Israel, but they did not understand exactly what kind of king he would be and how he would mount his throne through suffering. He would ascend by means of the cross; but even yet, understanding him to be the Messiah, it took the resurrection to blow their minds open and say: Whoa, wait a minute. There is more. They had said he was the Son of God, but now they realized – and so, the New Testament says that he was actually declared to be the Son of God by power through his resurrection from the dead. So, this is the event; and eventually that would – as they pondered this and studied and thought and searched the Old Testament – it all began to come together with the sense that Jesus really was fully and truly God. So, it vindicated him; it confirmed his identity, certainly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the way, we sometimes forget that, Dave; and your quoting that verse just now reminds me; we often have such a spiritualized version of who Jesus was; almost what we would call – not deism, but docetism – that we only key on his divine nature and we know he was divine from the moment he was born in Bethlehem, and so forth and so on; but the New Testament is very clear. What happened in the resurrection was God’s stamp of approval on Jesus. It was God’s public way of saying: See? He is the One. If Jesus had stayed dead, all of Jesus’ claims, even from God’s side, would have big question marks over them. The resurrection, among other things, was God the Father’s way of saying: Uh-huh. He is the One. This proves it.

DAVE BAST

So, it certainly made a difference for him, but I want to take what little time we have left and talk about how it makes a difference for us if we come to believe it. My pastor likes to conclude every worship service before he delivers the benediction – pronounces the blessing – he always says, “Remember, we live a world where a resurrection happened.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like that.

DAVE BAST

That is a great line, isn’t it? We live in a world where a resurrection happened; and that changes everything. That changes everything for us. In a sense, we are in no different shoes than the disciples were. We did not see it either.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

But, somebody has told us that it happened and we can look at the evidence for ourselves, as they did, and conclude: Yeah, you know, this makes sense, as mind-blowing as it is. But, what a difference it makes for our world, for our whole society. For one thing, it means that right is going to triumph over wrong in the end. Jesus was wronged terribly, but God vindicated him, as we were just saying.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the arc of the universe bends toward justice. The arc of the universe bends toward life. The universe does have purpose. If you just stare through telescopes into the coldness of space, beautiful though outer space is, a lot of scientists will say, “But, does it mean anything? Does it have any purpose?” If you only look at the surfaces of life, it is a little hard to see what that would be, but if you really do believe that we live in a world where a resurrection happened – that God has put himself on the side of justice and life in this definitive way – yeah, life does have a purpose and the universe has a future beyond whatever might happen in the physical cosmos.

DAVE BAST

And so do we, you know? Life has meaning and purpose. Death is not the end. I do not know what you would say – it always kind of saddens me when I read in an obituary: No services have been scheduled. No funeral. Because there is nothing to say or somebody just lived for a while and then they are no more; but not if we live in a world where a resurrection happened. Not if we ourselves have come to believe and have seen him, have met him, as they did, through his Spirit; now experience life and hope. Death is not the end. Death, as the old hymn says, is but our entrance into glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as another hymn says: Jesus lives and so do we. And that is why. That is also why, Dave, you reminded me, too, about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who was martyred by Hitler’s regime – by

the Nazis – right before the war ended, in Flossenbürg Concentration Camp – and as Bonhoeffer heard his executioners come up the hallway, he said to his fellow prisoners, “For me, this is the end, but it is also the beginning of life,” and Bonhoeffer could say that because Jesus lives, and so do we.

DAVE BAST

Lord Jesus, we worship and honor you. You died and rose again and are alive forevermore. Praise to you. Amen.

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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